

VZCZCXRO1419  
PP RUEHAG RUEHROV  
DE RUEHCV #0999 2002302  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 182302Z JUL 08  
FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1485  
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000999

SIPDIS

USSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/18/2018

TAGS: PGOV PREL VE

SUBJECT: BRV BLOWS HOT AND COLD ON A/S SHANNON AND COUNTERDRUGS

REF: CARACAS 987

Classified By: Daniel Lawton, Acting Political Counselor, for Reason 1.4 (b).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Foreign Minister Nicholas Maduro responded quickly and indignantly to WHA A/S Shannon's July 17 testimony before the House Foreign Affairs Western Hemisphere Subcommittee. Maduro declared the "imperial U.S. system" an "anachronism" and announced that Venezuelan drug seizures had "tripled" since ending cooperation with the DEA in 2005. The Foreign Minister acknowledged the USG's desire for better bilateral relations and left an opening for improved USG-BRV relations and counterdrug cooperation "as equals" based on "respect." The unquantifiable intangibles of "respect" and "equality" play to Chavismo's nationalist base and leave a convenient exit if cooperation proves too uncomfortable. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Within hours of A/S Thomas Shannon's July 17 testimony on Venezuela, Foreign Minister Nicholas Maduro held a televised press conference railing against the United States. Maduro called it "unimaginable" that another parliament would dictate "who was behaving and who was misbehaving." Calling the U.S. imperial system an "anachronism" in a "multi-polar world," Maduro boasted that the United States could not dominate the region like before because it faced a leadership that had "the courage, capacity and strength to speak its mind." Maduro counseled the United States to show some "common sense" and accept the fact they've "lost the capacity to dominate the region." Maduro said Venezuela was "ready to sit down" with the United States "as equals" adding the dialogue should be with the "frankness and transparency" that Chavez has brought to Venezuelan foreign policy.

¶3. (SBU) During the same press conference Maduro took aim at Shannon's comments on Venezuela's counterdrug efforts saying "nobody comes here kicking our institutions and police officers." Maduro claimed that all levels of U.S. leadership and policy-making were under the influence of the drug trade including the DEA and FBI. Maduro declared that Venezuela was more effective against drugs when it was "free and independent." To prove his point, Maduro asserted that Venezuelan drug seizures had tripled since the BRV stopped cooperating with the DEA. In the wake of Ambassador Duddy's letter (Para. 4) Maduro asserted that the United States "must show respect to move forward," otherwise the two governments would "just keep talking."

¶4. (SBU) Begin Text:

Dear Minister,

I was encouraged by President Hugo Chavez's remarks to me on July 5 in which he expressed his interest in renewing bilateral counternarcotics cooperation with the United States.

As an initial step towards this joint effort, I propose that we meet as soon as possible to discuss the particulars of how we should proceed.

I hope that we can work effectively together to combat the illicit drug trade in the cooperative spirit of President Chavez's recent remarks. I look forward to your response on this matter. End Text.

¶5. (C) Comment: Our Venezuelan contacts have been almost universally skeptical of the BRV's sincerity but foreign chiefs of mission have urged the Ambassador to press forward to see how Chavez will react. The political intangibles of respect and equality play to Chavismo's nationalist base and leave a convenient exit if the BRV deems cooperation too uncomfortable or politically inexpedient. End Comment.

DUDDY